

News

from the Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet



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ELECTRICAL SAFETY OP-ED FROM THE KENTUCKY PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Jan. 20, 2004)- The following is an op-ed column from the Kentucky Public Service Commission. You may use it at your discretion as "A message from the Kentucky Public Service Commission." Authorship should be credited to "The Kentucky Public Service Commission."

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A message from the Kentucky Public Service Commission

A record ice storm last year brought down hundreds of power lines across Kentucky. Thanks to efforts of utility companies and public safety agencies to warn people of the danger, not a single person was hurt as a result of contact with a downed line.

Unfortunately, Kentucky residents are not always as aware of the hazards posed by electric lines and equipment. Each year, the Kentucky Public Service Commission (PSC) investigates dozens of electrical accidents.

A few represent new or unusual ways to get into trouble with electricity, but the vast majority of accidents are caused by people repeating the same mistakes:

- Using ladders, especially metal or wood ladders, around energized power lines.
- Trimming or cutting trees near power lines.
- Attempting to retrieve objects that are on or near energized power lines.
- Climbing into trees that have power lines passing through them.
- Touching or approaching downed power lines.
- Digging in areas where power lines may be present without first having the lines located and, if necessary, the power turned off.
- Attempting to do repairs that should be left to a utility worker or licensed electrician.

The PSC is required by Kentucky law to investigate all electrical accidents that involve facilities of regulated utilities. That experience has led us to conclude that exercising common sense and following a few simple electrical safety rules could prevent the vast majority of those accidents. Those rules are:

- Do not approach any downed lines. If you see a downed line, call 911 and the utility company immediately.
- Never engage in any activity that might bring you into contact with an energized power line. Keep in mind that you, or any object you are in contact with, need not touch a power line. Electricity can arc, or jump, from a line to a person or object.

- Use only fiberglass ladders and fiberglass-handled tools in any situation where the ladder or tool might come near an electrical line, no matter how unlikely that may seem. Fiberglass is a poor conductor of electricity. Wood ladders are not a safe alternative.

- Be especially careful around power lines in wet weather. Because water is a good conductor of electricity, materials that normally do not conduct electricity, such as fiberglass, may do so when wet.

- Do not attempt to retrieve any object that is on or near a power line. Contact the utility for assistance.

- Do not climb into or attempt to trim trees that are close to utility lines. If a tree needs to be trimmed or removed, contact the utility company or a licensed arborist.

- If a power line falls across your vehicle, stay in the vehicle until help arrives. If you are forced to leave the vehicle, exit by jumping from the vehicle (do not remain in contact with the vehicle while your feet are on the ground) and then shuffle or hop away to safety. **DO NOT WALK AWAY** because the ground may be energized around the vehicle and walking away could cause electrocution.

- If you may be digging near buried utility lines, call before you dig. In Kentucky, the number is (800)752-6007. Member utilities will be notified to mark their lines. Under many circumstances, Kentucky State Law (KRS 367.4901 to 367.4917) requires that you call two business days before you dig.

While investigating electrical accidents is part of the PSC's job, it is not a task that anyone here enjoys. We much prefer to work on improving electrical safety. So please follow these simple rules and use common sense around utility lines. We'd hate for you to become the subject of one of our investigations.